His tolerant views, on the other hand, are revealed in another of the *Rezensionen,* dated 1754, and entitled *Rettung des Hieronymus Cardanus.* The significance that this composition has for us, is its exposition of the relationship of idolatry, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. The first three of these are again expounded in *The Education of the Human Race,* and the relation of the last three is revealed by *Nathan the Wise.* In addition to this, Lessing's independent viewpoint is interesting as showing how early he ventured to assail the bulwarks of conservatism. He says,[22] after commenting on Cardan's varied career, the story of which reads much like that of Paracelsus:

"It would have been a miracle if such a rare spirit should have escaped the suspicion of atheism. What more is needed to bring that upon one than to think independently and to challenge natural prejudices? Seldom has anyone, indeed, been compelled, as was *Cardan,* to unite abhorrent propositions to a questionable life.

"An apparent slander, which is still incessantly carried from one book to another, compels me to bear this suspicion in mind. It is founded, as is well known, on three things: on a book which he is said to have written against the immortality of the soul; on his astrological folly in casting a nativity of God; and finally, on certain passages in his work *De Subtilitate.*"

Lessing waives discussion on the first two of these and confines himself to the last. He then states the case against Cardan in the words of one of the latter's enemies as follows:

"In the eleventh book of his *De Subtilitate* he briefly compares the four chief religions (Idolatry, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism) with each other, and, after he, without deciding for any, has allowed them to contend with each other, he concludes with these careless words: *igitur his arbitrio victoriae relictis.* Which in good German means that he wishes to leave to chance the side upon which the victory may fall."

After quoting Cardan on the four religions, Lessing inquires:

"Why should this attitude be really condemned? Is the comparison of the various religions in itself punishable, or is the strife merely over the manner in which Cardan has undertaken the matter?

[22] Lessing's *Sämtliche Werke,* v. 17, p. 63, *et passim.* Cotta Library.

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"To maintain the first is not to be thought of for a moment. What is more necessary, is for one to convince himself of his belief, and what is less possible than conviction without previous proof."

And adds: "If the Christian is decreed to investigate only the doctrines of Christ, then the Mahometan is decreed to concern himself only with the doctrine of Mahomet. The former, it is true, would not thereby run the risk of changing a better belief for a worse, but the latter would, also, not have the opportunity of exchanging a worse, for a better. Yet why do I speak of risk? He must place a weak trust in the everlasting truths of God who fears, amidst lies, to maintain one against the other."

It was during this Berlin period, too, that Lessing produced *Sara Sampson,* based on the *Clarissa* of Richardson, in which he made another attack on rococo art, and endeavored to show, as Wordsworth did, fifty years later, that the lives of the humble contain adequate literary material.

In 1755 he went back to Leipsic and there made the acquaintance of von Kleist,[23] whose *Frühling* had elicited his warm applause. It was about this time that he wrote, in sentences, and very much in the style of his *Das Christentum der Vernunft,* a few thoughts entitled *Ueber die Enstehung der geoffenbarten Religion* which is of interest in connection with the notions of revealed religion that he published twenty-five years later in the *Education of the Human Race.* A few extracts will serve to show Lessing's position in regard to natural or positive religion and to demonstrate how much more weight he put on a man's real effort to bring out the best that was in him than on any creed. This is apropos when the chief idea of the Ring Story of *Nathan* is recalled.

"To acknowledge a God; to seek to entertain of him the worthiest conceptions; and to have respect for these conceptions in all our acts and thoughts—this is the most complete content of all natural religion.

"To this natural religion, according to the measure of his powers, is every man pledged and bound."

As this individual quality would cause insuperable individual differences, it is necessary to build up certain conventional conceptions which natural religious truths would inherently possess.

[23] The Tellheim of *Minna von Barnhelm.*

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